

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, DC - Today, reports indicate that gunmen attacked two mosques belonging to the Ahmadi community in Lahore, Pakistan, during Friday prayers. The attackers seized worshipers and battled security forces, with scores killed.

"USCIRF condemns this monstrous act of violence against a peaceful religious community and extends its condolences to the families of the victims," said USCIRF Chair Leonard Leo. "This is just one more example of the results of ongoing intimidation, thuggish threats and violence against the Ahmadi community in Pakistan. The Taliban-associated extremists find cover in the anti-Ahmadi laws in the Constitution, Pakistan's egregious blasphemy law, and the government's unwillingness to protect the religious freedoms of this community. The government of Pakistan must take responsibility for changing this situation."

"The United States must vigorously press Islamabad to address these religious freedom violations or more violence is sure to follow," added Leo. "For starters, the U.S. government must urge for the repeal of the blasphemy law."

USCIRF has documented systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of freedom of religion in Pakistan for several years. Sectarian and religiously-motivated violence is chronic, and the government has failed to protect members of religious minorities from such violence and to bring perpetrators to justice. Religiously discriminatory legislation, such as anti-Ahmadi laws and the blasphemy law, foster an atmosphere of intolerance in the country and embolden extremists. Growing religious extremism threatens the freedoms of expression and religion or belief, as well as other human rights, for everyone in Pakistan, particularly Ahmadis, women, members of other religious minorities, and those in the majority Muslim community who hold views deemed un-Islamic by extremists. Since 2002, USCIRF has recommended Pakistan be named a "Country of Particular Concern" by the State Department, but the U.S. State Department has not followed that recommendation.

Ahmadis, who may number between three and four million in Pakistan, are prevented by law from engaging in the full practice of their faith and may face criminal charges for a range of religious practices, including the use of religious terminology. Pakistan's Constitution declares members of the Ahmadi religious community to be "non-Muslims," despite their insistence to the contrary.

For more information on religious freedom conditions in Pakistan and USCIRF's policy recommendations to the U.S. government, see USCIRF's 2010 Annual Report Pakistan chapter, available here:

<http://www.uscifr.gov/images/ar2010/pakistan.pdf>

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF's principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

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